Starting a private practice as a new therapist

A step-by-step guide for new mental health professionals.



INSIDE

1 launch checklist

5 milestones

11 practical steps



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You just got your license. Now what?

This guide breaks starting a private practice into 11 steps, from deciding to go private to booking your first clients. Work through them in order, or jump to the one you need.

MILESTONE 1

Make the decision

01 Decide why you want to go private 4

02 Prepare to run a business 5

03 Start part-time or full-time 6

MILESTONE 2

Where you'll work

04 Choose where you'll see clients 8

05 Find an office space 9

MILESTONE 3

Fees

06 Set your fee 11

07 Become a registered provider for public programs 12

MILESTONE 4

Getting clients

08 Create a good online profile 14

09 Make it easy for clients to book a session with you 15

10 Reply fast to potential clients 16

MILESTONE 5

Working with your first clients

11 Set your boundaries 18

✓ Your launch checklist 19

→ A word from the authors 20

1

Make the decision

Decide if private practice is right for you, and how you'll make the move.

01	Decide why you want to go private
02	Prepare to run a business
03	Start part-time or full-time

01 Decide why you want to go private

To fully commit to private practice, be clear on why you want it. Take a moment to write down a few reasons why going private matters to you. You'll find some common ones below to get you started, but feel free to add your own.

Common benefits

Autonomy	You build something of your own, and get to make decisions about every part of your practice.
Flexibility	You're the master of your schedule. You decide how many clients you see a day, and when you see them.
Higher income potential	You don't give a cut of your earnings to a third party. Your session fee goes to you, minus your own expenses.
Room to grow	You can start solo, and if things go well, expand into a group practice of your own.

> WHAT OTHER THERAPISTS SAY
>
> "The autonomy is what gets me. I run this business in a way that fits me. I don't see more clients than I want to, and I schedule my day how I want. It's a breath of fresh air after working in rigid systems."

02 Prepare to run a business

Treat your practice like a small business. We're not taught how to run a business in grad school, so learning to think like a business owner requires a mindset shift. Don't worry, it's something you can learn.

What you'll take on

Marketing	Getting found by the right clients
Billing	Invoices, receipts and payments
Scheduling	Bookings, cancellations, reminders
Paperwork	Intake forms, notes, files
Taxes	Income and sales taxes

WHAT OTHER THERAPISTS SAY

> "Being a great therapist and running a business are two different skills. In private practice, you're doing both. It's not always easy, but it's very learnable, and the earlier you start, the better."

03 Start part-time or full-time

Decide whether to start part-time or full-time. There's no right answer. It mostly depends on your finances and how quickly you want your practice to grow.

Your options

Part-time

What it looks like. You keep a salaried job, for example at a CLSC, school or clinic, and see 5–8 private clients over one or two evenings or a weekend day.

A good fit if you have bills to pay and need a stable income while your caseload grows.

Full-time

What it looks like. Private practice is your main job from day one, and all your energy goes into building your caseload.

A good fit if you have some savings or low expenses, so you can get through a few slow months.

WHAT OTHER THERAPISTS SAY

> "A 5–8 client side practice is very doable without it eating your life. How much time it takes comes down almost entirely to how you set it up."

2

Where you’ll work

Choose your format and find a space that fits your budget.

04 Choose where you’ll see clients

05 Find an office space

04 Choose where you'll see clients

Choose whether you'll see clients online, in person or both. Your format affects your costs, your schedule and who can find you, so pick what makes sense for your situation right now.

Your options

Online

What it looks like. You see clients by video from a private room. All you need is a good camera and a secure video platform, so it's the cheapest way to start.

The benefits. You can reach clients anywhere in your province, and set a schedule that works around your own needs.

In person

What it looks like. You see clients in a rented office. Rent and travel add up, so many therapists start with a few half-days a week.

The benefits. Non-verbal cues are easier to read in the same room, and some therapists find certain approaches work better in person.

Hybrid

What it looks like. You set fixed in-person days and online days that your clients can choose from.

The benefits. You reach clients who prefer either format, and clients can switch to online if needed.

WHAT OTHER THERAPISTS SAY

"I do two full days in person (Monday and Thursday) and three days online. I love my schedule."

05 Find an office space

If you've decided to see clients in person, you'll need an office space. Here are a few places therapists usually rent from. Many rent by the hour or half-day at first, so you don't have to sign a long lease right away.

Where to rent a space

Clinics	Many clinics rent out rooms by the hour, half-day or day, and some will even send referrals your way.
Coworking spaces	They're often bright and modern, with shared lounges and kitchens. Look for private, soundproofed rooms you can book when you need them.

What to look for

- ✓ **Soundproofing.** No one should be able to hear sessions from outside the room, especially in older or shared buildings.
- ✓ **A waiting area.** Clients need somewhere to sit if they arrive early.
- ✓ **Convenient location.** Pick somewhere easy to find, with accessible parking and public transit nearby.

> CHOOSE A NICE SPACE
>
> Your space affects how you and your clients feel. Choose somewhere clean, modern and bright.

3

Fees

Set your fee, and see if you can register as a provider for public programs that can bring you steady referrals.

06	Set your fee
07	Become a registered provider for public programs

06 Set your fee

Decide what you'll charge per session. Start by looking at what therapists around you charge. Then, pick a fee that feels fair to you, covers your costs and is in line with your market.

When you look at what other therapists charge, focus on those who:

1. **Have similar experience**
   About the same years of experience as you, so you're comparing at your level.
2. **Offer the same services**
   Compare with people who offer what you do, like assessments or couples therapy.

Average session rates

PROFESSION	AVERAGE	RANGE
Psychologist	**$190**	$130–270
Psychotherapist	**$165**	$150–190
Counsellor	**$160**	$130–185
Social worker	**$150**	$100–200
Sexologist	**$125**	$100–135

Per individual session (usually 50–60 min). Data based on Promptd profiles in Montreal, Nov. 2026.

MAKE YOUR SERVICES ACCESSIBLE

Offer a few reduced-fee spots for students or low-income clients. You will be in high demand if you offer that.

07 Become a registered provider for public programs

See if a government program fits your expertise. In Canada, many government programs cover private therapy for specific groups of people. Working with them can bring you a steady flow of referrals. Here are a few worth looking into.

Some programs to look into

IVAC	In Quebec, covers therapy for victims of crime.	ivac.qc.ca ↗
CNESST	In Quebec, covers therapy for workers with a work-related injury or illness.	cnesst.gouv.qc.ca ↗
Veterans Affairs Canada	Covers veterans and their families.	veterans.gc.ca ↗
NIHB	Covers First Nations and Inuit clients.	sac-isc.gc.ca ↗
IFHP	Covers refugees and refugee claimants.	canada.ca ↗

Before you sign up for a program, make sure:

1. **It fits your practice**
   You want to work with these populations, and you have the right training for it.
2. **The terms work for you**
   You know what it pays, how much paperwork is involved and how long payments take.

> APPLY EARLY
>
> Registration can take a few weeks. Apply before you need it, so you can say yes when the first referral comes in.

4

Getting clients

Help the right clients find you, book you and hear back quickly.

08	Create a good online profile
09	Make it easy for clients to book a session with you
10	Reply fast to potential clients

08 Create a good online profile

Most people search for a therapist online, so you need a profile that's easy to find. It also has to stand out from the hundreds of other profiles people scroll through. The easiest way to start getting clients is to sign up on platforms where people are already searching.

A few platforms to find clients

Promptd ↗	Clients see your availability and can request a booking with you directly. You can list therapy, assessments and more.	**Fee only when a new client books**
Psychology Today ↗	One of the largest therapist directories in North America.	**Monthly subscription**
Your order's register	Every order lists its members, so make sure your details are up to date.	**Check with your order**

What makes a profile stand out

- ✓ **A good photo.** Professional, clear, recent and well lit.
- ✓ **Plain language.** Skip acronyms and clinical jargon.
- ✓ **Be transparent.** List your fee, format, languages, availability and insurance receipts, so clients can check the fit before messaging you.
- ✓ **Write for one type of client.** Name who you help and what you offer. Profiles written for everyone don't stand out.

> WHAT OTHER THERAPISTS SAY
>
> "I wrote my profile with one specific type of client in mind. Breaking away from the generic directory tone and resisting the urge to appeal to everyone builds trust. It also brings me clients I'm a good fit for."

09 Make it easy for clients to book a session with you

Set up a system to show potential clients when your next opening is. People looking for a therapist want convenience, and they want to be seen soon. The only way to give them that is to let them see your real-time availability and decide whether your schedule matches theirs.

Why real-time availability helps

Up-to-date openings	An “accepting clients” label often goes out of date. Real openings show clients when you can actually see them.
Less back-and-forth	Finding a time for a first session usually takes several messages, and it’s where a lot of clients drop off.
More bookings	So far, we’ve seen that on Promptd, therapists who show their real-time availability convert 3x more clients.

How to set it up

1. **Keep a calendar with all your busy times.** Google, Outlook or another calendar app.
2. **Sync it with your public profile.** Either on a marketplace like Promptd, or through the patient management system you display on your website/other pages.
3. **Clients request a time.** You confirm it, or suggest another time.

> SHOULD I OFFER A FREE 15-MINUTE CONSULTATION BEFORE A BOOKED SESSION?
>
> It can be a good idea when you’re starting out. Clients find it reassuring to talk with you before their first session, it’s good practice for explaining what you offer, and it helps turn more inquiries into bookings.

10 Reply fast to potential clients

Reply to new inquiries within 12–24 hours. Clients often reach out to several therapists at once, and if you're one of the first to reply, you're much more likely to get the booking.

To make replying faster

Use a template	Keep a few templated replies ready that you can quickly adapt. It makes answering clients faster and much less tiring.
Send your booking link	Let them pick a time right away, instead of going back and forth by email.
Write a short reply	No one likes reading long text. A short reply is quicker for you to write and more likely to be read.

What if they're not the right fit?

Say so kindly, and suggest a colleague or a directory where they can find someone. A quick, helpful reply leaves a good impression, and colleagues often refer back.

> WHAT OTHER THERAPISTS SAY
>
> "I turn on notifications for new inquiries, and block 10 minutes at lunch and at the end of the day to answer them."

5

Working with your first clients

Set clear policies before your first sessions.

11 Set your boundaries

11 Set your boundaries

Decide who you'll see, your hours and your cancellation policy before your first client. Boundaries can feel uncomfortable at first, but they're essential to running a practice. Sharing them with clients from the start will save you a lot of stress and resentment later on.

Decide and write down

Who you'll see	Decide which clients and issues you'll take on and which you'll refer out.
Working hours	Pick set times, like mornings, afternoons or evenings, so your days don't fill up with gaps or hours you'd rather not work.
Cancellation notice	Decide how much notice clients need to give to cancel without paying, usually 24 or 48 hours.

Should I charge for a late cancellation or a no-show?

Charging the full fee is standard, as long as it's in your intake contract. Many therapists make exceptions for illness or real emergencies. Whatever you decide, remind the client of your policy before you charge.

> WHAT OTHER THERAPISTS SAY
>
> "If a client cancels often, even with enough notice, I check in on whether their time slot still works for them. I tell them consistency matters, for both of us."

Your launch checklist

Tick these off one by one. You don't need to wait until everything is checked off before you start your private practice.

MILESTONE 1

Make the decision

- [ ] Listed my reasons for going private
- [ ] Prepared to run my practice as a business
- [ ] Decided whether I'll start part-time or full-time

MILESTONE 2

Where you'll work

- [ ] Chose online, in person or hybrid
- [ ] Found an office space

MILESTONE 3

Fees

- [ ] Looked at what therapists near me charge
- [ ] Set my session fee: $_____
- [ ] Decided whether to offer reduced-fee spots
- [ ] Picked the government programs I want to work with
- [ ] Registered with the programs I picked

MILESTONE 4

Getting clients

- [ ] Created my online profile
- [ ] Synced my calendar with my profile
- [ ] Turned on inquiry notifications
- [ ] Wrote a short reply template

MILESTONE 5

Working with your first clients

- [ ] Decided who I'll see, my hours and my cancellation policy
- [ ] Added my policies to my intake form

Ready to get your first clients?

Create your Promptd profile in about 15 minutes at promptd.app

Wishing you lots of success!

Starting a private practice takes courage. There will be exciting days and scary ones. You'll learn things grad school never taught you, and one day you'll look at your full schedule and feel really proud of what you built. ❤️



Viktoriya & Anas
Co-founders at Promptd

Follow our journey

Keep up with what we're building for therapists at promptd.app